

# MARIE JERITZA, NEW OPERA STAR, TELLS OF CAREER

Brilliant Soprano From Vienna, Still in Her Twenties, Has Sung in Sixty Roles, Many of Which She Created—She Tells in First and Exclusive Interview of Her Rise by Hard Work—Wonderful Personality on Stage Is Even More Charming in Private Life

RISING in the operatic firmament is what appears to be a star of the first magnitude in Marie Jeritza, a new soprano, singing at the Metropolitan for the first time this year. "Divinely tall and most divinely fair," Mme. Jeritza possesses a personality in keeping with her beauty and artistic skill. The accompanying interview, the first and only one given by Mme. Jeritza, reveals to New York Herald readers just how charming she is.

By WILLIS STEELL.

MARIE JERITZA (pronounce it with a "y," my lord), the Viennese lyric-dramatic singer who won with her first appearance at the Metropolitan Opera House a popular success, gives bodily life to a type of Teutonic loveliness that the Cornelius school of painters, and particularly Kaulbach and Overbeck, tried to impress upon the world with indifferent success. A kind of wilfulness, felt if not discerned in their attempt to graft a modern type on a Fra Angelico stencil, defeated their object. People might admire their tall, noble heroines with a wealth of blonde hair, but they did not believe in them.

The singer herself offers in her person as many contradictions. She is certainly taller than *Rosalind*—and her wonderful mane of spun gold and her eyes blue as unclouded sky give freshness to the little, tired words that have so long been used to describe these things. Flawless, too, is her figure, with pretty and delicate feet and an arm and hand seen oftener in sculpture than in real life, but her face is that of a very sweet and modern woman with full, pouting lips and features that, while they charm easily, do not conform to any standard of beauty.

She is a glowing blonde, the pink of whose soft skin shines out beneath any number of layers of makeup. In a word, she is personally as charming by the items in which she falls below the mark of real beauty as in those where she transcends it.

And while she typifies Vienna in a sense, the gay Vienna that laughs and dances on the brink of a volcano—just as her face is like that often seen on the *Ring Strasse*—there is more to her manner than that. Beneath the gaiety which perhaps she assumes as a measure of self-protection one sees, by looking a little deeper, a shy, proud, modest nature.

## Her Own Story of Her Career

### Proof of Most Unusual Modesty

A prima donna modest? It seems a misuse of terms. It need not be insisted upon, for if these qualities are hers they will not fail to appear in what she says later about herself and her career enclosing a decade and two years.

Mme. Jeritza is still fresh and unspoiled, unusually so for a world famous diva still in her twenties.

One would believe in her as an actress if one had never heard her sing and felt unconvinced that she was a singer. The histrionic talent born in a person and not acquired cannot be hidden. One would believe in her success, too, in any race for popularity, for that singular quality of magnetism, better perhaps than talent or even genius, with which she is widely endowed shows itself in a personal interview as it does on the stage.

What follows is a real attempt to repeat in print what amounted to a kind of family talk about the past, the present and the future of this singer. Her husband amplified the diva's halting English by his own, which, as he learned it in England, where his mother, Blanche Marchesi, daughter of the celebrated Parisian teacher of the voice, Mme. Marchesi, lived for a quarter of a century, is very good. He is Baron Popper, son of the first husband of Blanche Marchesi. She is living in Paris, and at 69 still sings, as Baron Popper said, "beautifully."

Marie Jeritza married the Baron four years ago. He is a tall, broad shouldered, clean shaven man of 35, retiring of manner and rather inclined to put forward the fact that he is more than the husband of a great artist, that he is in his own right a banker, with headquarters in Switzerland and a branch in Vienna. Also that he is an importer of American products which he distributes through the present small States as they now exist in central Europe. Baron Popper is going to Chicago by invitation of the Swifts as soon as he feels that his wife is contented and happy here and can be left alone.

## Speak Fearfully of His Trip.

### Brief Though It Will Be

The pair are so much in love that they cannot help speaking a little fearfully of this coming short separation. And yet Baron Popper explained—still with the idea of fixing his own status—that this visit to America is only the second trip he had made with his wife when she went to fill her engagements. The first was to Stockholm, a journey occupying forty-eight hours. "I would not go there alone," interjected Mme. Jeritza, "but had cancelled my engagement unless my husband accompanied me. I felt the same, and more, about this greater voyage to America."

Oh, well, they are a happy family, for the mother-in-law is as keenly interested in Mme. Jeritza's career as though she were her own pupil. "In a sense, I am," said the diva at another point, "for whenever I can I go over my roles with Mme. Belle-Mère."

"You will not ask me for impressions about your country or even your city. Since our arrival here in late October I have been working, working. What time have I to see anything but my rooms here in this hotel and the stage of the opera house in rehearsal and performance? To-day I was four hours in rehearsal, and I go again at 6 for still another hour. It is for 'Die Walküre.'"

"Now and then we have a time free, and

then, like yesterday, we go to see something light, a musical comedy preferably, for it is not difficult for me to follow that in a strange tongue. We saw 'Sally,' and it was delightful. Yes! I amused myself well.

"The theatre helps me to learn your language. I will surely learn to speak it, perhaps in a month!"

"A month!" exclaimed the astonished visitor.

"She will do it," said Baron Popper, nodding his head proudly; "she learns very quick."

"It is not that I aspire to sing in English," the singer added, "for I am content to sing in Italian and for the Wagner opera only in German. Mainly my repertoire is Italian, and I am pleased, for it is the tongue most easy to sing."

"My true debut was made in the Hof Opera, although I had sung for a year before and appeared as *Elsa* at Olmutz. That was in 1911, and in spite of the pleasant things that are now being written about my beginnings I think that I passed through a period of deep depression and discouragement in the early years. I disappointed myself and think I disappointed my teacher, Prof. Austitzer, who had trained my voice in *bel canto*.

"But that is my feeling always when I sing in a strange place and to people who have never before heard me. It is not that I am nervous at these times, for the feeling is worse than nervousness. I know that I will not be able to do all I can do when I go on and afterward I feel that I have not done all that I can do. It makes me very unhappy."

"Yes, this time I felt the same. The audiences have been most kind, the critics have been kind also, but the same feeling remains. Ah, I should like to say how great a difference I find between your writers on music and those of Europe. So often there they wish to be merely clever and shine as writers without regard to the artists. In New York they write as of a divine thing—music, the power of which they feel, therefore they are not petty."

"Do not think all critics abroad are little, seeing only themselves. The fine men are there, too. One of these, Rainer Simons, spoke the first real hopeful word to me—I mean in print—and I was am grateful."

"But let us go in order. My *Elsa* when I was only a girl was not a great success; nor was it so bad but that from it I did get a few engagements, and one of these was in Hamburg, where again I suffered because I thought I had not pleased. I did not like the life of travel, and when an offer came from the Volk Opera in Vienna I eagerly accepted. There I did better, and the people liked me. They liked me much better than I did myself, but still I worked, I worked and persisted to try to make myself a better singer and a better actress."

## Sang in Little Known Operas

### And Worked Hard Indeed

"At the Volk Opera there were many premieres, and the routine no doubt served me in my preparation, but it was hard. I sang in little known operas, like 'Siberia,' 'Quo Vadis,' 'Kuhreigen' and many, many others as obscure. The management sought for popular opera, and much that they chose displeased me and gave me little opportunity. But I tried to please them and the people, all the while feeling that my dreams which had been so lofty I should never realize."

"To me came the director of the great theatre of Vienna, who said: 'Little girl, why do you keep on singing and trying to put life in these dead things? You can act and you should be an actress. Come to us and I will make you a great actress; I will make you the greatest *Jessie d'Arc* in the world!'"

"Why he chose that historic martyr to tempt me from the opera to the dramatic stage I do not know, but I think it was because of my height. You see I am more than common tall."

Mme. Jeritza, who was always smiling or laughing, here laughed a little longer. "Oh, that height of mine!" cried she, "what discomfort it has caused me! Especially when they cast me for 'little girls,' and I tried so hard to shrink my inches and become the ideal *petite demoiselle*. And, truly, I suffered because I could not do the impossible. Now I will not look at a role which demands a diminutive heroine; so much I have learned, if no more."

"It was while singing at Ischi that fortune turned her face toward me when I had decided in my own mind that I would persist in singing for another year, when if I met with no more success I would go to the great director and say, 'Maestro, here am I, converted; make of me an actress if you will.'"

"But at Ischi Franz Josef, the old Emperor so beloved, heard me sing and liked me. He told his Chamberlain to let him know whenever I was in the bill, and always then he came to hear me. The director of the Court Theatre of Vienna has since told me that the Emperor on his return to the capital sent for him and advised him to engage 'the young girl whom he had heard at Ischi and whom he liked.'"

"There were difficulties in the way. I was under contract at the Volk Opera, which would not release me until finally the management of the Hof Opera in their desire to oblige the Emperor paid over to the Volk the necessary forfeit."

"At the Hof my debut was in an opera written by Oberleitner, 'Aphrodite,' which proved successful. While it was made from the same book by Pierre Louys as the opera sung here by Miss Garden, the version was quite different."

"Afterward I appeared as *Elsa*, *Senta* in 'The Flying Dutchman,' *Eva* in 'Meistersinger,' &c., but my first Wagnerian role was *siglinde* in 'Die Walkure.' Naturally,

New and exclusive photographs of Marie Jeritza, the new soprano at the Metropolitan opera. The one at the right shows her in private life; the other two in costume for two of her greatest roles, *Eva* and *Elizabeth*.



I never tried to sing *Brunnhilde*, as the music is not in my voice.

"I created in Vienna the part of *Hippie* in 'The Girl of the Golden West,' studying it with Puccini, which was a delightful and valuable experience, and may account for the great popularity this opera enjoyed there. I am astonished that its life here was short and particularly as in this country the story ought to be at home."

"In Vienna I was the first to sing Richard Strauss's *Solome*, and I created the leading role in the same composer's 'Ariadne,' but this time in Stuttgart. A great deal of favor was given to 'Die Tote Stadt,' Korngold's opera, which first introduced me to New York. Already I had sung in his earlier work, 'Violanta.'"

"People tell me here they do not like the dream idea of 'The Dead City,' and that it would be more effective if this were to be cut away and all that transpires be allowed to go forward like reality. I do not know, although I think I see their point of view. But we singers do not write libretti, as you know, and we do not often suggest changes shall be made in them."

"For myself I accept or reject a libretto as I feel it. If the story is big enough and human enough to make me wish to play in it I am enthusiastic; if not, I am cold. My experience so long protracted in doing my part to make characters live in the works of young musicians where no life was made me cautious."

## Seeks to Get at Real Self

### Outside the Fixed Interview

A resume like this of roles and appearances has come to be to artists all that an interviewer wants of them and it may follow that it is all that the public wants. The latter may be doubted. Such resumes are mere bones without flesh on them, and appease curiosity no more than the articulated skeleton in a shop window.

Mme. Jeritza was therefore begged to put the flesh on these bones and more completely reveal herself. But the effort puzzled her even though she declared herself amiably willing.

About the name 'Jeritza' where should be placed the accent?

Mme. Jeritza laughed merrily. "I don't know," she replied.

"Really, it is no name at all; I made it up.

Wasn't I clever? My own name is Moravian and quite impossible for foreigners to pronounce, although when it is spoken it bears a kind of resemblance to 'Jeritza.' I'm proud of the sound, for I have been assured that it is a musical word in any language. In every language, although perhaps not so in Chinese."

And here she laughed again quite like a child.

For her acting she tried, she said, to make a character live, and in order to do this she sought to live the character. What she was trying to express is a stock phrase of our own actors who are ambitious (they say) to get under the skin of a character they happen to be representing on the stage.

It is more difficult, in her opinion, to succeed in doing this when one is singing words than when one is speaking them. But she insists, in spite of many famous instances to the contrary, that the singer can and should be an actress, too. In *Floria*, which is a distinctly acting part, a lack of acting ability would be pitiful, but there are many, too many, roles in the operas (this is a paraphrase of her words) which suggest nothing and where the singing actress must herself invest them with character. Thus *Elsa*, who might be and often is merely a vague musical sweetness, can be transformed into a real woman if the singer studies her and works to that end.

"I must be the person," said Mme. Jeritza, "at least while I am singing a role or I do not believe I could sing it. Too many times I have failed to do more than to sing the music and give diction to the speech set down; this was in my earlier days. Always at such times I felt a sad premonition, and I was as yet too callow to know why it brooded over me. That very *Elsa* must have been at the start one such failure."

## Refuses Roles Unless She Likes

### And Can Live the Character

"Now if I am not interested in the character I refuse it, and my refusal is not whimsical, but based on good reason. I do not care for the librettist's character, or she does not appear to me to live in his mind. Therefore I will not play it."

"Nobody is infallible, and I may have made many false interpretations, but always I seek the truth, and it frequently dawns

like a true sunrise when I have given much, much time to study. After such a light breaks on my understanding I am willing. I am happy to do all that lies in my power to bring the same dawn to my audiences."

"You ask me if I neglect words and, forgetting them because of insufficient study or for any reason, I substitute vowel sounds and thus keep the music and gain my effect. No, no, never. Scrupulously do I learn and carefully retain the words of my roles. I am very unhappy when unaccountably I forget and treat my poet with scant courtesy. Truly he deserves full attention to his poem. I give it to him with a full heart and brain."

"Am I an actress before singer? Have I said anything that would give such an impression? My conviction is that the two are one, and if they are only married at least no one should put them asunder. A librettist for the opera has incompletely done his work if he has not provided a living character even for a lyric artist. It is asking a great deal of the artist to make her go out in search of what will give it life. Fortunately for some lyrical scores where the heroine was but a stalking horse to hang tunes on, these have been sung by great women who did breathe life into them and the traditions remain."

"I have not rested content with tradition when I thought I saw it was possible to retouch it to bring more vitality to a part. But I do this with discretion, I hope, for I honor good tradition."

Mme. Jeritza deplored the fact that she would see very little of this strange city for a long time, as she sees before her a season of real work. Not that she dislikes the thought of work, being injured to it, she said, from her arduous beginnings.

"The glimpses I have had of this bright, gay city and its cheerful inhabitants have filled me with a wish to see more and to know them better. Am I really so good as they say? Will they continue to like me as I go along and become more familiar? Oh, I hope so."

"This cheer and this happiness throw into darker relief my poor Vienna. Times are bad there, very bad, so much worse than they are in Hungary. I sang quite recently in Budapest, where things are looking up and the people are working. There they have crops, but it is not so in Vienna, as a few persons have money there, and these are new people, what you call profiteers."

"It must all be made over. The life, the business. All that was once must be wiped out and new things begun. While the old ones persist there will be no real progress."

"But the Viennese are most brave; meeting misfortune and poverty with a smile full of courage. They will win, yes, I am sure, the future has happiness and a better prosperity than they ever had in store for this devoted people. I am not a true Viennese, as you perhaps do not know: I was born in Brunn, in Czechoslovakia. But in my heart I admire these brave citizens who have been so kind to me."

"It is strange, but I feel before an audience here precisely as I did at my debut

in Vienna. The feeling is not one caused by nerves, as I said before, because I have my nerves well under control. It is deeper. I am unhappy before and after I sing, because I never please myself. Every artist may feel the same way, and I am saying a trite thing twice over. Perhaps. But it explains me a little as you asked, doesn't it?"

Mme. Jeritza cleared up a perplexing point about her engagements during the war. It had been said that she sang in the Imperial Opera House throughout those awful years. She sang, she said, whenever she was asked to do so "to help" sustain the morale, but never for money, giving her services freely to the State. In the meantime she accepted paying engagements in other countries of Europe, and early in the war she had appeared in a city of Russia. This year, too, she heard Chaliapin for the first time and admired him immensely.

## Her Singing and Speaking Voices

### Express Her Full Sincerity

The speaking voice of the singer does not indicate what her singing voice would be. It is very light and delicate, with a silvery note running through it, while the Jeritza voice in the opera house is a rich, opulent and magnificent organ. In its flow is a complete revelation of emotion, and along this line the full quality of the singing voice and the lighter texture of the speaking join. Both express her sincerity.

She talks as if she meant every word she says, and it is quite possible to believe that she means every word she sings. If this be true it not only accounts for her gift of magnetism, but it explains, too, why she stands among the great dramatic singers of her generation.

"I have asked many great women singers a certain question," remarked her interviewer. "It's a sort of formula, and may I put the same question to you which Mmes. Melba, Galli-Curci and Mary Garden have answered?"

Mme. Jeritza looked a little frightened, but nodded her assent.

"What have you to say to the countless young American girls who are studying voice in the hope to sing in opera?"

"Oh," she said, relieved, "I can only say to them what I have often said to similar aspirants in Europe. It is that there are two requirements—first, the voice, and, second, the purpose. Singers are not made overnight, but by years of persistent endeavor. And they must be willing to sacrifice, sacrifice. They must leave off everything that does not tend to the great object."

"I worked so hard—no parties, no dances, nothing. I am working still. The young singers must decide for themselves if it is worth while and, affirming that it is, they must sacrifice. Otherwise all is useless."

With the prettiest but the most sweeping of gestures the singer waved out of her ken the singing girls who would eat their cake and have it, too, and incidentally with the same gesture she got rid of her questioner.